

*Fulmarus glacialis* is from Skjonghelleren cave (Sunnmore) in Norway and is dated to c. 30,000 BP (Larsen *et al.* 1987).

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## On the status of *Ara tricolor* Bechstein

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The Cuban Macaw *Ara tricolor* formerly occurred on Cuba and the Isle of Pines. It has been extinct since around 1855 and about fifteen specimens survive in museums in Europe and North America. It was not unlike the Scarlet Macaw *Ara macao*, but was smaller and had a yellowish crown and yellow hindneck. The upper back was red, with green edges to the feathers, the lesser and median wing coverts darker red or maroon, the wings purplish blue, the tail red below and blue above with red bases to the feathers.

Wetherbee (1985, 1986) transferred the name *Ara tricolor* Bechstein (1811) from the extinct Cuban Macaw to an also extinct form from Hispaniola, and renamed the former *Ara cubensis*. His arguments have gained acceptance by the American Ornithologists' Union Committee (A.O.U. 1989).

The basis of Wetherbee's argument is that Cuba was ornithologically unknown until 1822, so that any species described before that date could not have come from Cuba. This is the only argument he puts forward to suggest that *A. tricolor* did not come from there, but it would only be valid if it could be shown that no species had been described from Cuba prior to that date. This is, however, not the case. A search of Bond (1956) reveals at least 4 species described from Cuba in the 18th century: *Amazona leucocephala* (Linnaeus 1758), *Zenaida*

*macroura* (Linnaeus 1758), *Melopyrrha nigra* (Linnaeus 1758) and *Tiaris canora* (Gmelin 1789). Furthermore, there is an 18th century specimen of *Ara tricolor* in the Paris Museum (F. Roux pers. comm., discussed below). Wetherbee's entire argument therefore collapses. Having believed he had shown that *A. tricolor* did not come from Cuba, Wetherbee then assumed (without any evidence) that it must have come from Hispaniola, and conducted a detailed search of French naval archives to try to show that the only person in the right place at the right time to have collected the first specimen of *A. tricolor* was the French naval captain Baudin in 1797 (Wetherbee 1988). These researches while probably accurate become irrelevant since there is no reason to doubt that Cuba was the correct locality.

Wetherbee sought to differentiate the Cuban and Hispaniolan Macaws on the grounds that the former had red facial skin and the latter white, overlooking the fact that this is not a diagnostic character since it is well known that the white facial skin of a live macaw will flush to pink or red (George Smith pers. comm.). He further argued that Bechstein's name must have referred to a specimen from Hispaniola, not Cuba, because the plate of Levaillant, on which his description is based, depicts a bird with white skin. As this is not a criterion on which differentiation can be based, *Ara cubensis* must become a synonym of *Ara tricolor*.

The existence of a macaw on Hispaniola is known only from the accounts of Buffon (1779) and other early writers; no specimens are known to have been collected. Buffon noted that macaws were formerly very common in the eastern part of the island. A letter from one of his correspondents indicated that after the French settlements extended to the tops of the mountains, these birds became less common. Clark (1905) considered the bird to be the same as *Ara tricolor*. Rothschild (1905, 1907) disagreed, but never assigned it a name. Greenway (1967) discussed other early references to the Hispaniolan macaw, including the report that its forehead was white, not red, as in the Cuban macaw. Wetherbee may have misinterpreted "forehead" as meaning the facial skin. *Ara tricolor* and the Hispaniolan bird probably formed a superspecies with a similar form, *Ara gossei* Rothschild, from Jamaica. This is known only from a specimen shot about 1765 by a Mr Odell, but no longer extant. It differed from *tricolor* mainly in having a bright yellow forehead (Gosse 1847).

There is a further matter to be discussed. Barraband (not spelled Barraland, *contra* Wetherbee) was the artist who prepared the original water colour paintings for Levaillant's *Histoire Naturelle des Perroquets*. In many cases these are of much higher quality and accuracy than the resultant published plates (George Smith pers. comm.). In 1988, Barraband's supposed water colour for the plate of "L'Ara tricolor" in Levaillant (1801) was reproduced in full colour in a sale catalogue (Sotheby's Monaco 1988). This water colour appears to differ from all known published plates, and specimens, of *Ara tricolor*, in having the "shoulder" of the wing (the lesser wing coverts) bright red, the maroon area being confined to the median wing coverts. I consulted Dr F. Roux of Paris, who kindly advised me (pers. comm.) that the Muséum

National d'Histoire Naturelle has two specimens of *Ara tricolor*, the older one being one of some 90 specimens remaining from the time of Buffon. It is without locality or date, but is believed by the Museum to have been the specimen on which Daubenton's plate in the *Planches enluminées* (see below) was based. There is, however, no evidence that it was the specimen on which Barraband's plate was based, the origin of which is at present a mystery. (The second specimen in Paris was not received till 1842, and is therefore not relevant.)

Bechstein's name, *tricolor*, was based on Levaillant's description, which was in turn based partly on the *Planches enluminées* (Daubenton 1771–86) and partly on a specimen in the Paris Museum, probably the one referred to by Roux above, but there is apparently no specimen which can confidently be claimed as a holotype of *A. tricolor*. Barraband's water colour, therefore, does not appear to affect either the taxonomy or the nomenclature of *tricolor*, but raises the possibility that there may have been another taxon, of which we still know nothing.

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